



RATS AND MICE IN THE OFFICE

Rats and mice cause more fear and loathing than any other pest. But rats and mice have it all over them in mystique. They represent destruction, disease, and everything dark and threatening. They are considered to be evil.

(Of course, the bulletin does not refer to rats and mice kept as family pets. Pets are kept clean, confined and disease free.)

Sanitation

Good housekeeping is extremely important in rodent management. All animals have three requirements for life: food, water and cover (also known as harborage). Eliminating these items will reduce rodent populations rapidly. Sanitation must be constantly enforced if rodent management is to be effective. Yearly cleanup programs are generally ineffective.

To implement sanitation practices:

- Clean up trash and debris outdoors, and boxes and clutter indoors.
- Properly store garbage; keep tight-fitting lids on trash cans.
- Properly store food in tightly sealed containers or in rodent-proof rooms.
- Remove harborage: piles of trash, junk, boxes and protected enclosures.
- Dry up sources of water. Clean up crumbs and food residue at the end of each day.
- Don't leave any possible food source where rodents can access it, such as in desks.
- Trim dead fronds from palm trees and remove or thin dense ground covers such as ivy to substantially reduce rodent harborage.
- Close dumpsters at night, make sure the lid is on tightly, and cover drainage holes with metal screens to keep rodents out.

Exclusion

Also call rodent-proofing, this involves sealing a facility so that rodents can not get in. The smallest rodents, young rats and mice, are the dispersing individuals and are the ones most likely to invade new areas like your office. Use rodent-resistant materials to block all possible rodent entry points (gaps greater than 1/4"). Rodents found indoors after rodent-proofing must be eliminated by trapping. During the first two weeks after rodent-proofing, rodents will find any new way into a structure. Inspect frequently during this time and promptly repair any cracks or other entry points.

Other rodent facts:

- Any opening that a pencil can fit through will admit a mouse.
- Rates can climb the inside or outside of vertical pipes.
- Rats can jump several feet in all directions.
- Mice and rats do not travel far from their homes for food and water.
- Rats need water daily, mice do not.

In most cases of rodent infestation, the pest animals can be controlled without having to resort to the use of poisons. The practices of good sanitation and exclusion will prevent most problems. If rodents do find their way indoors, small population can be easily eliminated with various nontoxic methods.

Poison Baits

A rodenticide (rodent poison) need only be used in cases of large or inaccessible infestations or where unsanitary conditions exist with harborage. Although uncommon, secondary poisoning of pets or wildlife can result from eating poisoned rodents.

Trapping

Trapping is an underrated method of managing rodents and is often preferable to the use of poisons. One reason trapping is often overlooked is that snap traps have been around for a long time and are cheap. Traps are effective when dealing with small numbers of rats or mice.

Traps can be used to eliminate rodents where poison baits would be dangerous, to prevent rodents from dying in inaccessible places and causing an odor problem, and to eliminate bait-shy rodents. There is no chance of an accidental poisoning or secondary poisoning of non-target wildlife, pets, or children with the use of traps. Traps can be used in situation where poisons are not allowed, such as in food handling areas.

Rats and mice have different behavior around new objects such as traps. Rats are cautious and it may be a week before they approach a trap. Mice are curious and will normally approach traps the first night.

Glue Traps

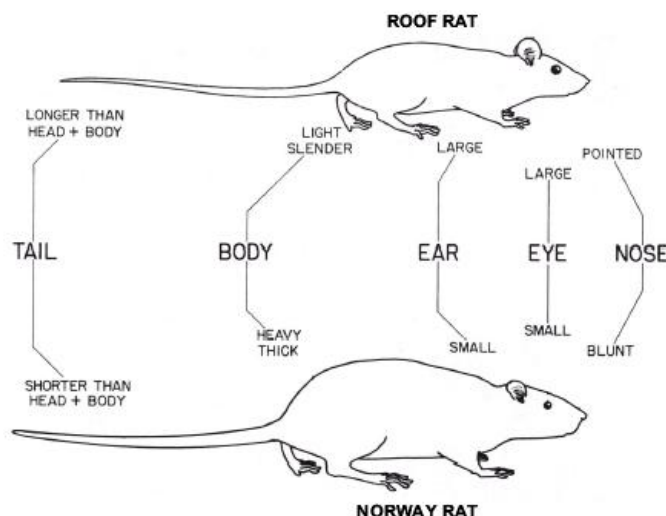
These traps do not kill the rodent, but hold it until it can be dispatched. Glue traps are especially useful for mice, and where snap traps could be harmful to children, pets or inmates. Glue traps can be placed wherever rodents travel. Baiting is not required: rodents simply blunder into them and get stuck. Dusty and wet conditions will impair glue trap effectiveness.

Predators

In general, cats and dogs are not good tools for management. Most pets are well fed and too lazy to hunt. Studies have shown that although predators can keep a rat free area from being invaded, they cannot remove an existing infestation.

Birds of prey, hawks and owls, feed on large numbers of rodents. Barn owls are exceptional rat killers. An owl pair can be expected to kill several hundred rats over a one year period. Many species of snakes are very beneficial in rodent management. Do not kill non-poisonous snakes.

Your facility's IPM Coordinator is there to assist you, and may request help from the Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures' Control Program.



From Bjornson, B. F., and C. V. Wright. 1960 (revised). *Control of Domestic Rats and Mice*. Center for Disease Control, USDHEW, Public Health Service Pub. 563